



Joint Committee on Labor and Public Employees
Raised Bill No. 5238, *An Act Concerning Expansion of Family and Medical Leave*
Submitted by: Catherine Bailey, Legal and Public Policy Director, Connecticut Women's
Education & Legal Fund
February 27, 2014

My name is Catherine Bailey and I am the Legal and Public Policy Director of the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF). CWEALF is a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering women, girls, and their families to achieve equal opportunities in their personal and professional lives. Part of our mission includes advancing the economic success of women and protecting their rights in the workplace.

I also serve as co-chair of the CT Campaign for Family Values at Work, a coalition of organizations representing the needs of working families, and who support paid family leave for workers who need time away from work to care for a loved one, a member of the military, a new child, or for their own illness.

In both of these roles, I am here to testify in support of Raised Bill No. 5283, which would expand Connecticut's Family and Medical Leave Act (CT FMLA). Caregiving for children, sick relatives, and elderly parents most frequently falls on the shoulders of women in the workplace. In fact, the average U.S. caregiver is a 49 year-old woman who works outside the home and spends nearly 20 hours per week providing unpaid care to an elderly parent for almost five years.¹ With the baby boomer generation aging, the need for care will continue to rise. CT FMLA, however, does not provide sufficient protections for employees to tend to their family's needs in the most desperate of times. These situations often come as a surprise and are almost impossible to plan for.

This bill takes the first step in expanding CT FMLA to meet the needs of those who develop serious health conditions by adding a parent-in-law, sibling, grandparent, or grandchild to the list of family members for whom an employee may take leave under the statute. This expansion is critical as household and family structures vary in Connecticut and individuals may be called upon to care for extended family as well as immediate members.

While FMLA is a needed resource, less than 60% of employees in U.S. are actually covered by FMLA,² leaving many workers in Connecticut unable to protect their job if they need to care for a father recently diagnosed with cancer or a child suffering from depression. To take this bill a step further, we recommend the committee examine the categories of people able to benefit from

¹ Lynn Feinberg and Rita Choula, "Understanding the Impact of Family Caregiving on Work," AARP Public Policy Institute, October 2012.

² Department of Labor and ABT Associates, "Family and Medical Leave in 2012: Executive Summary," September 7, 2012, Updated September 13, 2013.

this law to more closely reflect federal law. For example, CT FMLA only applies to employers with 75 or more employees, but should be amended to apply to employers with 50 or more employees, like federal law.³ Also, CT FMLA provides 16 weeks of leave in a two-year period, whereas FMLA provides 12 weeks each year.⁴

Even though approximately 60% of employees are eligible to take leave, an even smaller percentage of employees can actually afford to use FMLA – only 13% in 2012 – because they simply cannot afford it. The Campaign for Family Values at Work advocates for a paid family leave insurance system because of the benefits to workers and families, including improved newborn and child health, lower use of public assistance, and positive changes in wages.⁵ In fact, new mothers who take paid leave are 54% more likely to report wage increases and 39% less likely to need public assistance than mothers who do not.⁶ Paid family leave also benefits businesses, by strengthening labor force attachment and reducing worker turnover costs.⁷ Having already-trained employees with greater morale and loyalty to the company will benefit businesses' bottom lines.

We also recommend a technical correction to account for same-sex marriage in Connecticut. Section 31-51// (g) should be amended to replace the terms "husband and wife" with "spouses."

Workers should not have to choose between their jobs and caring for themselves or an ill family member. Thank you for your consideration in doing what is right to support Connecticut's workforce and the health and well-being of their families.

³ 29 U.S.C. § 2601, *et seq.*; C.G.S. § 31-55kk.

⁴ 29 U.S.C. § 2601, *et seq.*; C.G.S. § 31-55ll(a).

⁵ Linda Houser, Ph.D., "Pay Matters: the Positive Economic Impacts of Paid Family Leave for Families, Businesses and the Public," Rutgers Center for Women and Work, January 2012; "The Case for a National Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program (The FAMILY Act)," National Partnership for Women and Families, February 2013.

⁶ "The Case for a National Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program (The FAMILY Act)," National Partnership for Women and Families, February 2013.

⁷ Linda Houser, Ph.D., "Pay Matters: the Positive Economic Impacts of Paid Family Leave for Families, Businesses and the Public," Rutgers Center for Women and Work, January 2012; "The Case for a National Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program (The FAMILY Act)," National Partnership for Women and Families, February 2013.